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ABSTRACT

Society is currently in the process of shifting its central focus from the production and distribution of material goods to the production and distribution of information. Indeed, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal that the majority of people are now involved in occupations that center around information rather than around industry. It is critical for educators to realize that the computer does not equal the information age; rather, it represents the catalyst that is transforming society's central project to information, just as the machine transformed society's central project from agriculture to industry. In light of this change, educators at all levels and in all spheres are challenged to reeducate others that the changes currently underway in society represent a much more fundamental shift from emphasis on material growth to an emphasis on human growth and development. Moreover, the role of lifelong learning in an information society becomes central. Educators dealing with all segments of life from youth to old age are in a position to catalyze the shift to an information age or society. In this catalysis the role of the educators becomes that of providing education in which learning how to learn supersedes learning how to be taught and in which acquiring information is supplemented by the development of competencies for learning throughout one's life. (MN)

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LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Marcie Boucouvalas[1]

Paper presented at "Education and the Information Age" Conference

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Lifelong Learning and the Information Society

I can't begin to tell you how thrilled I am to be here with you this morning. Lifelong Learning and the movement of society to an information age have been areas of both professional and personal interest to me for a number of years now. So, I'd like to take this opportuntiy to commend and congratulate the University of Virginia for convening us here together as a group of practioners, scholars, and researchers to foster a better understanding of Education in the Information Age.

My own presentation will address two main themes: (a) The meaning of an information age, the transformational nature of moving from an industrial to an information society, and the role of the computer in this process, (b) The meaning of lifelong learning and its role in an information society.

Reaching as far back as the 1950's, a multidisciplinary-based body of authors has been addressing the coming transformation of industrial society, among them: Anthropologist, Margaret Mead; humanistic scientist, John Platt; economist, Kenneth Boulding; cultural historians, W.I. Thompson and Theodore Roszak; philosopher and urban sociologist, Lewis Mumford; social analyst and futurist, Willis Harman; and others. More recently, however, the transformational theme has likewise surfaced in popular literature, which is geared to a lay audience. How many of you are familiar with books such as Marilyn Ferguson's The Acquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation for the 80's?, Alvin Toffler's The Third Wave?, John Maisbitt's Megatrends? All corroborate--knowingly or unknowingly--the analysis and predictions of our multidisciplinary-based scholars.

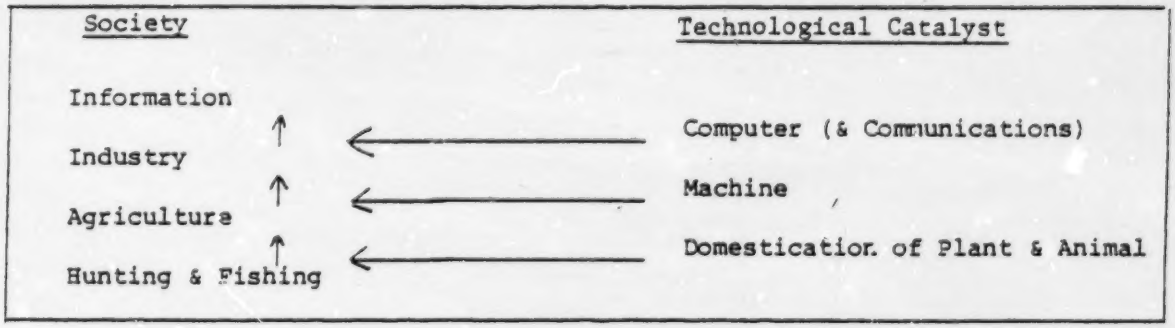
Essentially, transformation from an industrial to an information society involves a restructuring of society's central project from the production and distribution of material goods to the production and distribution of information. A review of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics will reveal that, indeed, the majority of people are now involved in occupations which center around information rather than industry. The statistics likewise demonstrate that this incremental trend began in the mid-fifties (probably around the period when the first computer appeared).

Interestingly, I've been "running around" asking people what they thought the information age was all about. You might guess it--that the computer is the first thing that comes to people's minds. Nearly everyone responds with the thought: "Well, I think it has something to do with the computer."

I think it's critically important as educators that we recognize that the computer does not equal the information age. Rather, it represents the catalyst which is transforming society's central project to information just as the machine transformed society's central project from agriculture to industry.

If we look at things in a broader context, we see that in each previous transformation TECHNOLOGY has done the work previously done by humans.

(on newsprint):



Although technology acts as a catalyst to restructuring the social order (the meaning of transformation), societal change goes much deeper than a technological level. The technology precipitates changes which likewise effect value shifts and a different world is born. Let's take a look at some of these changes, a number of which have been addressed by Yosidi Masuda in his book The Information Society.

(on newsprint)

Industrial Society	Information Society
Technology	
Machine Technology extends Physical Ability	Computer Technology extends Mental Ability
Major Value	
Affluent Material Consumption (Capital)	Knowledge (Information)
Training in Technical Matters Important	Development of Potential Talent of each Individual Important
Social Structure	
Hierarchies and Central Bureaucracies	Multi-centered and Horizontal Networks
Force for Social Change	
Labor Movements	Citizen Movements

You've probably all heard the term post industrial society used to describe our current societal progression. I prefer, however, to use the term transindustrial coined by Willis Harman of Stanford University, since it more clearly communicates the transformative character of going beyond ("trans") rather then merely occurring after ("post") industrial society. In fact, his discussion perhaps best illustrates a central challenge to all educators as learning becomes a major concern of society's organizations, institutions and agencies.

(on newsprint)

Selected Features of Society under an Industrial vs. Trans-Industrial Paradigm

Industrial		Transindustrial
Emphasis		
Economic & Material Growth	———	Human Growth & Development
Concern		
Physical Frontiers of Geography & Technology	———	Inner Frontiers of Mind and Spirit
Learning		
Activity of limited duration in preparation for "real business" of fitting into institutions of industrial society	———	Learning a prime concern of all phases of life and all social inistitutions

Educators at all levels, in all spheres, therefore, are challenged to first reeducate others that bits and pieces of what we may be experiencing actually represent a much more fundamental shift from emphasis on material growth to an emphasis on human growth and development. Moreover, as the information age

and the ability to store, retrieve, generate, and communicate information continues to expand, it should become increasingly evident that the process of learning throughout life becomes essential. Information does not equal knowledge. The role of lifelong learning in an information society or age, therefore, is central.

Lifelong learning, in its most comprehensive sense, refers to a movement --worldwide in schope--the ultimate purpose of which is the creation of a learning society.

(on newsprint)

LEARNING SOCIETY

Entails:

1. Availability of a gamut of learning opportunities at all ages and stages of growth by a variety of educational agents (not just the schools).

2. Development of self-directed lifelong learners.

If we take a parallel look (newsprint side by side) we can see the striking similarities between Harman's transindustrial society and a learning society. Lifelong learning professionals, therefore, (which inlcude educators dealing with all segments of the life span from youth to old age) occupy a central role in catalyzing a shift to an information age or society. Lifelong learning is not only a movement aimed at developing a learning society from this information age, it is also a process by which individuals continue to grow and develop throughout life. Our responsibility is education for a transforming society in which learning how to learn supercedes learning how to be taught, in which acquiring information is supplemented by the development of competencies (skills and attitudes) to learn throughout one's life. Lifelong learning, at heart, is

a socio-psychological concept, aimed at both individual and societal self-renewal and growth. Continuous learning is essential for coping with and growing from change in the information age.

In conclusion, let me leave you with a challenge--a quote from Marilyn Ferguson's The Acquarian Conspiracy: Personal and social transformation for the 80's:

> "The poignant human paradox [is] a plastic brain capable of endless self-transcendence, equally capable of being trained into self-limiting behavior."

and one from Willis Harman:

> "If we fail to realize that modern industrial society is indeed pregnant with the new social order and mistake the creative forces for threats to our well-being, we could end up with the birth process being far more disruptive than need be -- perhaps even with a miscarriage."

How well education and educators understand and respond to these challenges will be critical. The choice is ours.

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